




Communication and Home Sharing

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*Connecting
women to live
secure, safe
and happy
lives*



Living together while home sharing is a wonderful opportunity to meet and connect with new people and there's so many benefits to living together. So much to be gained and enjoyed, but how do we give it the best chance of working once you've started living together?

Well, one thing is for sure, from time to time we can find each other's habits and behaviours challenging or even sometimes irritating. Even though the other person has no intention to be irritating, that's how it can come across to you!

It's likely issues will arise from time to time, so it's not a question of 'if' but 'when' difficulties arise and this short guide gives you a chance to think ahead about how you'd like to approach resolving these experiences and provides some suggestions to try.


Better still, having difficulties with home sharing relationships is good news because working through difficulties actually builds and strengthens relationships even more.

Create joy in the relationship bank!

It's helpful to build a good relationship with the people you are living with and you'll probably have ideas on how to do this from your own experiences in the past.

Even little things like saying 'thank you' when your home sharer has done something helpful, all adds to the relationship 'goodwill bank', like when you are going to the supermarket to do your shopping, checking in to see if there's any small item they have run out of that you could pick up; or sharing about how your day went and listening to how their day went; it all adds to a sense of having a caring and supportive home environment and strengthens the relationship.





Note down some ideas that you could try to build a good living relationship using your previous experiences. Consider what you would appreciate from someone you are living with and what you could offer to them.

So now that you have thought about your intention to create a respectful caring living relationship from the outset and the ways you can build this connection, what about the times when difficulties arise?

Noticing when I'm annoyed

When something does arise that you find irritating or annoying, one helpful place to start is noticing what is your experience of this moment. Where do you feel it in your body? Does your face change and start to feel hot? Are your eyes soft or are your eyebrows knotted together? How does your chest feel? For example, are you holding your breath or breathing heavily? Try to recall the last time you felt annoyed about something and what happen in these parts of your body or somewhere else in your body.

What sorts of thoughts begin to arise?

Getting to know how feeling irritated or annoyed shows up in your body is useful because you can start to notice when these sensations happen and begin to explore why. Noticing what your thoughts are saying is really useful. Both of these steps are important because it gives you a golden opportunity right here to pause, reflect and to see what's happening from your perspective.

Imagine this situation:

Around 9pm, Susan comes out of the study after a Zoom call with her daughter and she looks around the kitchen and she can't believe it, but Susan can't even find space to put her coffee mug down because of the clutter. Her house sharer, Pat usually does her dishes after dinner and this has been agreed earlier as house sharing understanding, but tonight, for some reason, she's left a big messy pile of plates, leftover food and pots on several benches and in the sink.

And Pat's car has gone from the driveway. Susan can hear herself quietly breathe out and start to think 'what's going on...this isn't what we agreed, she's really letting me down'

Allowing myself to feel annoyed

With this situation of Pat leaving a mess in the kitchen or a similar challenging situation, a good place to start is to give yourself time to feel your feelings fully in response to the situation.

You could sit down for a minute and totally connect with and feel your sense of the feelings as they arise. Let the feelings be there in your body. Breathe in and gently sit with your feelings.

For example: If you live with other people and this happened in your home tonight, imagine how would you experience this? Which feelings would arise? Where would they be located in your body?




Thinking about why I feel annoyed

The next step is to carefully consider why you are feeling annoyed about the situation.

We interpret experiences in different ways, often drawing from our previous experiences and as a result we filter our view of the events through our past knowledge and experiences and make up a story about the situation. So, it's super helpful to consider why you are finding this situation difficult.



For example: With our earlier situation of Pat leaving every bench space cluttered with dishes and leftover food, would you find this a problem? Why or why not? How would you explain Pat's dishes pile up to yourself? What sort of thoughts come to mind? Note them down.



Writing down your thoughts and feelings about a situation gives you a moment to bring to life exactly how you see the situation or in other words, your perspective on it.

It also gives you a chance to process what you've noticed about your response to the situation from more of an objective perspective and to consider what to do next.

Giving myself care and attention

After noting your thoughts about the situation; it's a good idea to do something nice for yourself.

Emotional first aid is an important step to look after yourself and to finish releasing the emotional charge to the situation.

Does a cup of tea help make you feel better, or a hot bath, a hug, a decent cry, finishing a craft piece, or wrapping up in your favourite blanket? What makes you feel better?

Nice things I can do for myself:





Preparing what I'd like to say

Sometimes it's good to discuss issues that arise and sometimes there's another solution instead of talking. If you feel that you'd like to discuss an issue, thinking ahead about how you'd like to discuss it, takes the pressure off you having to think on the spot and gives the conversation a chance to go well.

When preparing what to say here's some practical steps you may like to try:

1 Invite the person if they have time to discuss something e.g. *'Pat, I like to discuss something with you, do you have time now?'*

2 If she says yes...describe the facts of the situation and share how you felt about it e.g. *'When I came out of the study last night there was a lot of dishes left on the benches and in the sink. I felt overwhelmed and annoyed because we agreed to do our dishes after dinner and I'm not sure what was going on because you usually tidy up'*

3 Invite a response back e.g. *'I'm curious to understand what happened because you're usually so on to it. Why was there a dishes pile up?'*

This approach gives Pat an opportunity to respond or not (she may not have time to discuss it now), it gives her information on how you felt in a non-blaming way that uses 'I' rather than 'you' language and lets her know what you thought about what happened and then invites her to respond in an information seeking manner.

Would you try this approach or something like it? What would you say? Imagine being in this situation with Pat and write down what you'd say.



Thinking about what they might do or say

If you know your home sharer well, you might consider what her likely response will be to your feedback and questions. Does she usually shut down a discussion and walk away, or ask for time to think about it and get back to you, or listen to you and explore what happened with you, or become defensive or something else.

If any of these responses happen, how will you feel?

As your home sharer responds to your request to talk and your quick summary of what happened, stay aware of the the feelings arising in your body as she responds back. Gently observe how you are feeling and at the same time, concentrate on listening to what she's saying. Doing two things at the same time. Easy to do right?



Inviting the other person into a discussion


Inviting the other person into a discussion means that you are open to hearing what her perspective is on what happened. Up until now, you have only been aware of your own thoughts, assumptions and feelings or 'story' about what happened. Now we are intentionally inviting the chance to learn more and to grow the story to include what happened from her perspective.

For example:

Pat says: 'I'm sorry about the mess I left, Susan. My friends and I were having a great time over dinner together, then I got a text from Rachel saying that she's gone into early labour and was being taken to hospital by ambulance. Shocked because she not due for another two months, I didn't know what to do. But I felt a strong sense that I had to be with her. I blurted out to everyone to what has happened and that I need to go to support Rachel and then burst into tears. We all got up hurriedly and left. I didn't even think about the mess in the kitchen.'



Being open



As Pat was speaking, Susan noticed she felt concerned and that she was holding her breath a bit while she spoke. Gently easing back into breathing comfortably, Susan acknowledged what Pat has said.

‘Pat, that sounds like a big shock and a stressful piece of news to receive by text. No wonder you left quickly to help your friend Rachel.’

And Pat nodded and replied: ‘Yes and I knew you were busy on a zoom call with your daughter so I didn’t want to disturb you to let you know that I’m leaving’



Reflecting that both perspectives are true

Now in our example, Susan has much more information and the ‘story’ has expanded to include Pat’s perspective, thoughts and feelings.

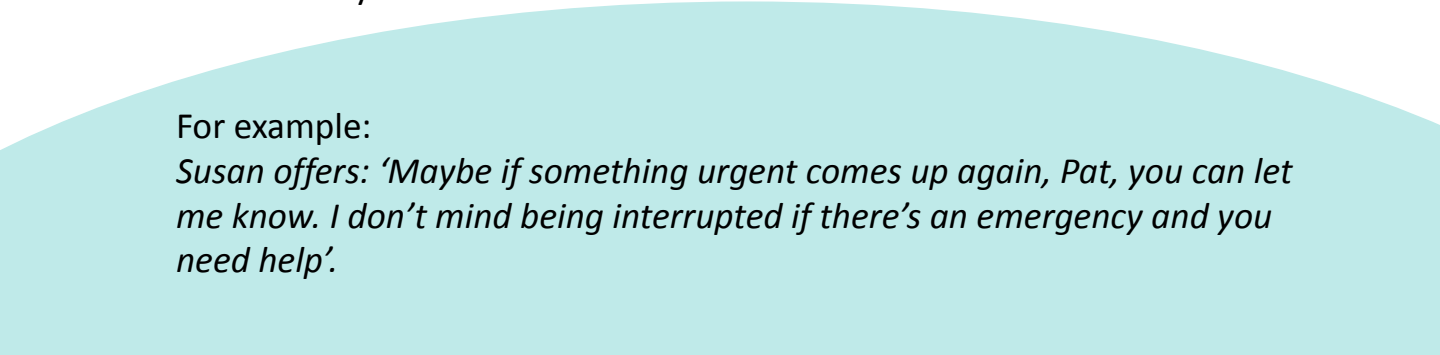
Susan takes a moment to notice how both parts of what happened are true from each person’s perspectives. Susan remembered how annoyed she felt at seeing the mess in the kitchen. With this extra information, Susan felt relieved that she didn’t launch into Pat with annoyance at her leaving the mess behind.



Exploring solutions together

Now that both people are aware of each other’s perspectives and feelings, here’s an opportunity to figure out what could have been done differently. In the situation with Pat and Susan, what are some suggestions that come to mind for you?

For example:



Susan offers: ‘Maybe if something urgent comes up again, Pat, you can let me know. I don’t mind being interrupted if there’s an emergency and you need help’.



Agreeing what to do next

In our example, both Pat and Susan are in a position to have an open conversation about how it could go better next time, if there's a similar situation in the future. This is largely because each woman's feelings, assumptions and 'story' about the other person hasn't driven the conversation from the outset.

These important factors were acknowledged, expressed and nurtured before they discussed about the situation took place. If both women's feelings and assumptions are not brought into awareness before the conversation, they can sabotage the conversation.

In our example, imagine if Susan had angrily confronted Pat the next day without knowing what had happened the night before. Pat would most likely feel pretty hurt, unheard and maligned by Susan and Susan, after finally understanding the wider picture of what happened with Rachel, would probably feel bad about how she handled it.

In the end, both women settle on agreeing that it's okay to text each other if an emergency crops up and Pat agrees to remember to let Susan know by text when something out of the ordinary happens.



Letting go of the outcome

In our example, both women were able to manage the conversation with care and respect. Sometimes conversations don't always go as well.

At the end of the day, ideally, each person is responsible for doing the best they can to be clear and careful with communicating with their viewpoint, while listening carefully to the other person respond and trying to resolve the issue with mutually agreed solutions. Once you've been through that wash and spin cycle, it's time to let go because it may or may not work.

People are fallible and even though they agree to solutions, they may start out following the new steps and then one day, completely forget altogether. In our example, Susan hopes Pat will feel comfortable texting her in the future and that she remembers to do it.



Pat feels closer to Susan because she felt heard by her in the conversation and she realises that Susan cares. Despite the chances of future mistakes or slip ups on agreements, it's worthwhile following a resolution process that respects each person and has a chance to build the relationship.

Give it a try and let us know how it goes!

Notes:



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